

BRIEFS

PHYSICIANS NEUTRAL ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (BP) — Delegates to the October annual meeting of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) voted to embrace a stance of "engaged neutrality" regarding physician-assisted suicide. "By moving physician-assisted suicide into the 'neutral' position, the [AAFP] is communicating that this practice is within the realm of acceptability... By taking a hands-off approach, it doubtlessly tips the scales in favor of legitimizing physician-assisted suicide," said Andrew Walker, director of research and senior fellow in Christian ethics for Southern Baptists' Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, in written comments for Baptist Press. The reach of the assisted-suicide movement has grown since Oregon became the first state to legalize the practice in 1997. Physician-assisted suicide is now in effect in California, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, Washington state, and the District of Columbia.

DATE, THEME SET FOR NAT'L DAY OF PRAYER

ROGERS, Ark. (BP) — "Love One Another" is the theme for the 2019 National Day of Prayer May 2, event president Ronnie Floyd has announced. Floyd, a former two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention and senior pastor of multi-campus Cross Church in northwestern Arkansas, said, "I realize that our task today is daunting and quite intimidating. I don't have all of the answers, and I don't think any one of us would have all of the answers, but we do know ultimately Who does have all of the answers. Who has a greater passion and a greater vision to redeem the world and that's Jesus Christ, the living Son of God." The National Day of Prayer was created in 1952 by a joint resolution of The U.S. Congress and signed into law by U.S. President Harry S. Truman. Every president since Truman has signed a National Day of Prayer proclamation.



United States Courthouse, Jackson. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

Fed judge rejects abortion limit

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves in Jackson struck down a Mississippi law Nov. 20 that banned abortions after 15 weeks, describing the legislation passed in March by the Mississippi Legislature and signed by Gov. Phil Bryant as "pure gaslighting."

Gaslighting is "a systematic pattern of abuse by which the abuser manipulates factual information to give the victim the impression that they cannot

trust their own senses," according to the Urban Dictionary.

Reeves, an appointee of U.S. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, also accused state lawmakers of deliberately creating a scenario that could ultimately result in a challenge to *Roe v. Wade* in the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The State chose to pass a law it knew was unconstitutional to

endorse a decades-long campaign, fueled by national interest groups, to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade* [the 1973 decision by the high court that found a constitutional right to abortion]. With the recent changes in the membership of the Supreme Court, it may be that the State believes divine providence covered the Capitol when it passed this legislation. Time will tell."

Bryant spokesman Knox Graham said in a statement



REEVES

see ABORTION on p. 6

God is not done with the SBC, says Greear

DURHAM, N.C. (BP and local reports) — The president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is "more convinced than ever" that God is not done with the SBC and is "extending us an invitation to trust Him."

J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., said in a recent Facebook Live broadcast that he has been preaching at state Baptist convention annual meetings and other gatherings this fall about "the primacy of the Gospel in our mission, the primacy of the Gospel in just shaping who we are as a people — what we're identified with," as a reflection of his Gospel Above All theme for the SBC annual meeting in 2019 in Birmingham, AL.

Greear said the three main applications he has emphasized in the Gospel Above All theme are:

■ Asking every Southern Baptist to pray for and share the Gospel with one specific individual in 2019.

■ Asking every church to take the next step in church planting. While some congregations may be ready to plant

see SBC on p. 7

Did John Allen Chau do the right thing?

ANDAMAN ISLANDS, India (BP) — The last reported sighting of American missionary John Allen Chau was Nov. 17. Fishermen off the coast of India's North Sentinel island spotted what they thought was his lifeless body being dragged across the beach and buried by members of the Sentinelese tribe.



CHAU

The Sentinelese are an isolated people group known to rain down arrows on outsiders who visit their home island in the Bay of Bengal. Though he knew the danger, Chau, age 26, went as a missionary to the Sentinelese because they are reportedly among the world's 400-600 unengaged

unreached people groups (UUPGs) that have no contact with the outside world.

In all, approximately 3,200 of the world's 11,576 people groups are defined as UUPGs.

"You guys might think I'm crazy in all this but I think it's worthwhile to declare Jesus to these people," Chau wrote in his last note to his family, according to media reports.

Chau's apparent death has drawn reports in major media outlets across the world and has sparked discussion among evangelicals. While there has been nearly universal agreement among believers about the heroism of Chau's effort to reach the Sentinelese with the Gospel, mission strategists continue to discuss the wisdom of his methods.

Was Chau's landing on North

Sentinel island via kayak and his subsequent announcement of God's love to the Sentinelese the best strategy? "We don't know," said Keith Eitel, dean of the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth.

Yet to be determined "is the inspirational impact of such a martyrdom," he said, noting the impact of the 1956 martyrdom in Ecuador of missionary Jim Elliot and four of his colleagues when they tried to reach an uncontacted UUPG.

Chau, who served with the missionary organization All Nations, paid a group of fishermen Nov. 14 to take him to North Sentinel, according to media reports. For two days he used a kayak to travel the half mile from the boat

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

The Creep

Las Vegas is already known for its exotic, eye-popping eccentricities that draw people from all over the world intent on handing over vast sums of their money to enjoy what are, essentially, rigged gambling scams. (When the state has to force casinos to pay a certain, pre-set percentage back to the suckers who are otherwise wasting their money, called "winnings" in the twisted parlance of the industry, it's a rigged scam.)

When a state like Mississippi elects leaders like Republican Govs. Phil Bryant and Haley Barbour who never turn/turned down a chance to tout legalized thievery in the form of gambling as the answer to all our problems, coupled with a compliant legislature that doesn't care about sending our meager resources to out of state bank accounts by the billions, just about anything is possible as in Nevada.

Nevada has casinos? So does Mississippi. Nevada has sports betting? So does Mississippi. Nevada has breathtaking bankruptcy, domestic abuse, and suicide rates? So does Mississippi. Nevada has the largest recreational marijuana superstore in the country? So does... hold on - do our gambling governor and all the toadies in the Legislature know about that?

Planet 13 in Las Vegas is opening its doors to residents and visitors alike who apparently can't dip deeply enough into the river of alcohol flowing through that desert town to be satisfied. Thus the privately owned, 120,000-square-foot marijuana dispensary was built to help people in search of the next thrill on the ever-growing list of inappropriate overindulgences for which Las Vegas is so famous.

After all, the town advertises its image as, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." Wonder what means?

To put Planet 13 in perspective, the average size of a WalMart store today is estimated by nasdaq.com to be about 131,000 square feet.

"We're still trying to out-Vegas Vegas," Larry Scheffler, co-CEO of Planet 13 Holdings, Inc., told KVVU-TV, the local FoxNews affiliate. "We've invested \$1,000,000 into special effects. Everything

from floating orbs from Germany that we brought over, to interactive floors like giant iPads that are 10 feet by 16 feet, to laser graffiti that is outside that the customers can interact with."

Floating orbs. Interactive floors. Giant iPads. Laser graffiti. The total cost of the Planet 13 cannabis merchandising and entertainment complex upon completion is estimated at \$7.5 million.

That's not all. The Planet 13 web site is a vast encyclopedia on the use of marijuana including articles with titles such as The Newest Edible Craze: Cannabis Tonics; Can CBD [Cannabidiol, an active ingredient in marijuana] Help Your Pups?; and Tourists' Guide to Choosing the Best Cannabis Products.

That's not all. The web site also provides a convenient order form for Planet 13 products. Customers can choose from a variety of attractive, one-gram packages of marijuana at "competitive prices" with names like Cherry Diesel, Blue Alien, Death Star Cherry Pie, and Cookies 'n Cream.

Of course, Planet 13 hastens to add the disclaimer, "This website may not be used where access to or use of this website or any part of it may be illegal or prohibited." Right. That has worked so well in keeping alcohol out of the hands of minors, hasn't it?

Over the course of many years now, we have suffered from alcohol creep in Mississippi to the extent that it's now freely available in supermarkets. Over the course of not nearly as many years, Mississippi has suffered from gambling creep, going from small riverboats that must be on the water to giant land-based mega casinos and widespread sports betting.

If we're not vigilant, the same type of creep will occur with marijuana in this state. Before we know it, another drug will overrun Mississippi just like alcohol has done and another despicable enterprise like gambling will enjoy an intractable grip on our everyday lives.

We don't need that, but another vice to inflict on the people of Mississippi in the name of "revenue?" Just wait until our state leaders hear about that.

Photo On My Phone

On my phone, there is a photograph that I catch a glimpse of every day — sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. Some days I linger a bit longer but regardless, I see it every day. It's a very personal and protected photo to our family, one that we will forever cherish and hold dear.

It's the sweet and timeless image of our 18-week-old, stillborn son.

Seeing his beautifully formed, yet tiny face with its already perfectly poised lips, nose, and cheeks never fails to snap me back to that unforgettable Wednesday morning not too long ago when our family's giddy excitement was prematurely cut short by the words, "I'm so sorry, but your baby no longer has a heartbeat."

It was in that exact moment that I came face to face with the mortality and fragility of life. Suddenly the world felt a bit more finite than I was ready for.

The next 48 hours proved to be a whirlwind of decisions we never thought we'd be making. Medical terms were thrown about and incredibly but conflicting advice swirled around us in no short supply. Apparently, I was too far along for a D&C (dilation and curettage) so either a D&E (dilation and extraction) would have to be performed or I could go through a normal and painful labor process.

After spending some time together in prayer and wading through our options, we looked at each other and just knew that, for us, the best way to preserve the dignity of our God-given unborn child was through labor and delivery.

Ultimately, having the opportunity to see, hold, love on, and say goodbye to our boy gave us clarity that we had made the right decision. Our few hours with him will always be a special time in our lives that we won't take for granted. It was a bittersweet moment in which we learned to celebrate the value of life in a very tangible way.

Part of preserving our son's dignity came in the naming process. Years before as we had been preparing for marriage, we daydreamed about the children God may choose to bless us



Guest opinion

with Sammi Carby

with. We had chosen a name for our daughter Catherine, born in 2009, and we had chosen a name for our son.

On the day of his delivery, while holding his still and lifeless body, neither of us could bring ourselves to call him by his name. I think we just didn't want it to be real, for our time with him on this earth to be over. However, after a few hours of countless tears, prayer, and finally rest, we woke up, looked at each other and just knew: This was our Gabriel.

It would be very hard to convince us that our son wasn't yet a baby. We were already able to count all 10 tiny fingers and 10 tiny toes. Our son was every bit a life, every bit a baby, and every bit our child. While many in the world may not value our son's 126 days of life, God's Word promises us that He does.

"Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be," the psalmist wrote (Psalm 139:16, NIV). Though our time with Gabriel was shorter than we ever dreamed, imagined, or wanted it to be, we too will always value his brief but precious life.

Carby is a homeschooling mother and member of Gambrell Street Church in Fort Worth, Texas, where her husband Paul is an M.Div. student at Southwestern Seminary. This column first appeared at the seminary's Biblical Woman website (biblicalwoman.com) and appears here courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style and length.

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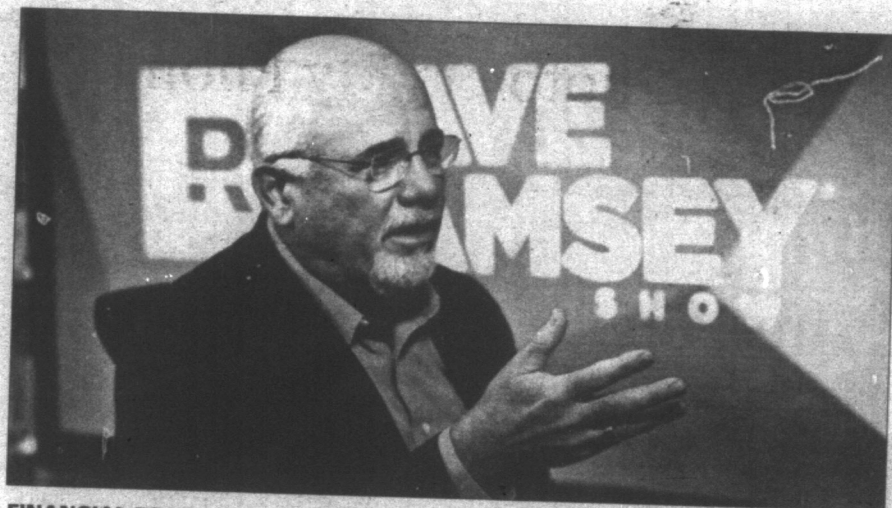
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FINANCIAL PEACE — In his Nashville-area radio studio, Dave Ramsey sat down with Baptist Press to talk about helping pastors and their congregations navigate the daily financial challenges they face. (BP photo)

Ramsey's Financial Peace University gains momentum

NASHVILLE (BP) — This summer at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Dallas, Dave Ramsey, the CEO of Ramsey Solutions and author of Financial Peace University (FPU), spoke to pastors and other Baptist leaders about stewardship and what the Bible teaches about debt.

He offered FPU — a 12-week financial planning program — for free to pastors who attended the SBC meeting along with the accompanying leader guides at a discounted rate. This fall, more than 15 state conventions are featuring the program at their annual meetings.

In his Nashville-area radio studio, Ramsey sat down with Baptist Press (BP) to talk about helping pastors and their congregations navigate the daily financial challenges they face.

"I've always had this incredible love of pastors," Ramsey told BP. Ramsey describes most of them as underappreciated and underpaid. He said many pastors "could take that same skill set in the marketplace in most cases and make more money."

Ramsey acknowledges his advice can sometimes generate criticism and its share of hate mail. He said one piece of advice with which not everyone agrees is when he urges pastors to stop preaching about tithing to "broke people."

"Unless you've done two sermons on... debt — one on getting out of debt and one on getting on a budget," he added. "That's the ratio for me instead of just tithing, tithing."

Without those initial sermons on debt and setting a budget, he said, the reaction to a sermon about tithing is often, "Yeah right, I've got a light bill. That's

a great spiritual concept. Maybe someday I'll get around to that."

Ramsey's straightforward financial advice to pastors and their members seems to resonate well with them and others. More than 4.5 million people have participated in FPU, according to the ministry's latest stats, and Ramsey has more than 13 million weekly radio and digital listeners to The Dave Ramsey Show. He has a million followers on Twitter.

Pastors of churches both big and small seem to enjoy leading their congregations through Ramsey's Financial Peace University. Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, which began using FPU in 2005, gifted the training to participating members of the congregation. More than 6,000 people from Cross Church have participated, the church reported.

Ronnie Floyd, Cross Church's senior pastor and former two-term SBC president, said it's well worth the investment for the congregation's personal and family future.

"Christians and non-Christians face the same grim reality: The leading cause of divorce in marriage is financial trouble," he said in an e-mail interview. "Therefore, we believe as the church we must do all we can to equip our people and the people in our region on how to deal with their financial struggles."

Ashley Clayton, vice president for Cooperative Program and stewardship with the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, said the SBC's partnership with Ramsey Solutions is gaining traction. He noted he meets regularly with the Ramsey team and is seeing interest grow among state conventions.

"These state conventions are offering FPU at a discounted rate to help their churches get started," Clayton said, noting that he is "seeing more and more churches of all sizes embrace the course to help their people become financially healthy."

The average family pays off \$5,300 in debt and saves \$2,700 during their FPU experience, "which allows them to become more generous," Clayton observed.

"Many churches are also seeing visitors from outside of their church attend Financial Peace University, creating an opportunity for evangelism," he added.

Clayton also highlighted a strategic partnership with the North American Mission Board and Ramsey Solutions that will offer FPU to all of their church planters to "equip them to enter ministry in a better financial position."

More than 200 church planters have utilized the course so far this year, he said.

Ramsey emphasized in the BP interview that getting out of debt is the key to giving, "because if you're out of debt and on a budget and you love Jesus, I think tithing is a natural thing that occurs."

Ramsey said in addition to helping churches, he wants to reach those who aren't involved in church. Ramsey said he gets especially excited when his practical tips on handling money and debt help pastors lead someone to following Christ.

"You can't beat that. That's about as good as it gets," he stressed. "I came from the outside world, not the church world and so I want the financial peace classes to be an attraction to someone like I was — a reason for them to come over to the church to go to class to get out of debt but, oh by the way, Jesus is there."

Church discovers less debt means more missions

UNION CITY, Tn. (BP) — The math is quite simple at Second Church in Union City. No debt equals more resources for missions. For the first time in 15 years the church is learning to live debt-free,

pastor Justin Hiens said.



HIENS

In 2003, the church began a relocation process that eventually would cost more than \$12 million. Hiens joined the church that same year, fresh out of college, as youth minister, serving there for nearly five years before moving on to become pastor of churches in Georgia and Mississippi.

When Hiens returned to Second Church as senior pastor in 2015, the debt had been reduced to about \$2.5 million but it was still crippling the ministry of the church in the town of 10,000, 115 miles northeast of Memphis.

Nearly 34 cents out of every dollar given was going toward debt. "There was not much left over for missions and ministries," the pastor said.

Hiens led the church to consider, "How could we impact our community and the world if we didn't have debt?"

Though church members had given faithfully over the years, they intensified their efforts over the past three years until they were only \$200,000 from being debt-free earlier this year.

As the church began preparing for a new budget year that began Sept. 1, Hiens said they took a step in faith by engaging in a 40-day season of prayer and fasting, "believing that God would provide" the money to pay off the debt by the end of August.

God did just that. It was "not just to pay off the building," Hiens noted, but to "start channeling to missions."

When the budget was presented to the church before the debt was paid, it included an additional \$100,000 for missions bringing its total missions budget to \$260,000, Hiens said. The church's giving to the Cooperative Program and the local Baptist association together totaled 10%, a threshold not met for 20 years.

The church celebrated its debt-free status with a special

service on Sept. 9. As part of the occasion, members read through the Bible beginning three days earlier and culminating on that Sunday.

Based on Nehemiah 8, we believed that the greatest way we could celebrate was committing ourselves to the Word of God, Hiens said.

What makes the church's accomplishment so amazing is that over the 15 years of retiring the \$12 million debt, no gift over \$100,000 was ever received. The debt was paid by members being faithful and giving over and over again, Hiens said.

Second Church is not located in a large growing community. "We are a church in a small, rural community that has not seen population growth in decades," Hiens said. Yet, he continued, "God is raising our church to touch our neighbors and the nations."

In the past couple of years, Second Church has seen one of its own members appointed as a missionary by the International Mission Board, which is a first in its history. The church also has partnered with the North American Mission Board to help plant a church in New York City.

The church is also establishing a ministry center to meet needs in its own community, the pastor said. In addition, the church began an international Sunday School class that is reaching about 30 internationals, many of whom are students at nearby University of Tennessee-Martin.

A Chinese communist student recently accepted Christ, Hiens said, noting, "The nations have come to us."

Hiens is an advocate for rural churches to "dream big," believing that "God can use them in incredible ways to change the world for Christ."

"We want to show that when God's people commit themselves to His work, the sky is the limit in what we can do for the Lord."

Hiens said he is humbled by the faithfulness of Second Church's members over the years to tackle the debt. "I am proud of our people and their commitment to the Kingdom of God."

"We have funds now to do ministry that we never dreamed we could do before. We give God all the glory for these great things He has done."

"We want to show that when God's people commit themselves to His work, the sky is the limit in what we can do for the Lord."

Justin Hiens

pastor, Second Church, Union City, Tn.

I think that it was probably the coldest day in the winter of 2018. When I say it was a cold day, it was a cold morning. Somewhere around 5:00 a.m., I turned on the local news and heard the weather person say that the "real feel" temperature was minus four degrees. The wind was blowing hard and picking up the icy cold and making it even colder. I went ahead and prepared to go walking on that coldest of mornings.

The more I thought about it, the less enthused I was about going out into the cold. I pressed on and finally opened the door and headed out. I thought to myself only an idiot would go out on a day like this and walk in the cold. After I had walked down the street for several minutes, I saw absolutely no one. No one was out walking or out doing anything. My assessment was right. They were smart. I was not.

I pressed on in the dark until the dawn began to arrive. It was just before sunrise when I heard something up above me in a tree. It was a chirp, a weak chirp. One bird, one lonely bird with a cold, weak chirp. I stopped and looked at him about twenty feet up as his chirp came about every four or five seconds. I wondered if there were any other birds around. There were none, but this bird continued his mournful chirp.

I had no idea what the other birds were doing or where they were, but they weren't



With Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

A Lone Bird

perched on a limb in the blowing cold where this bird was. He was all puffed up. I could not even tell what kind of bird it was. He was puffed up to stay warm like birds typically do, but it did not appear to be working. While I myself was cold, I had on about seven layers of clothing and besides that, I knew I would soon be home in a warm place again.

I kept on walking, staying close to the tree where that bird was sitting. It appeared as though he didn't want to fly anywhere. I was wishing I could help him. I knew I couldn't go get a blanket and throw it around him. There was really nothing I could do, but my reflections on wanting

to help him led me to consider the people who may be cold and shivering and lightly chirping. I have seen people like that often times through the years as they are forced to find a place outside the community of faith in the cold of this world, alone and sadly chirping and needing help.

You have seen folks like that, too. You may have occasionally been that person. How many times do we get outside of the family of God and sit in the cold, chilly, loneliness of our own existence? These people often think they don't need anybody, but they do. The author of Ecclesiastes wrote that two are better than one. They can keep each other warm. That

would have worked for the little lonely bird in the tree that morning, but I didn't know where the others like him were. This dude was freezing, all by himself.

How many people — God's people — fail to experience the wonder and the warmth of life that can be shared in Christ Jesus, if we would just care enough to care for each other? I'm certainly aware of the fact that a church can become so ingrown and ingrained in their own interests that they forget everybody else. Sometimes we lose sight of the fact that we are to care for one another and that people who sometimes need care and love and grace the most get it the least. God help us when we see a lonely bird in our existence, our world. Try and find a warm place for them and help them pull up to the edge of the table.

There are occasions when we seem to love lost people a whole lot more than we like the saints who get lost in this world and may find themselves shivering on a limb, chirping in the early morning light. I am not a cold weather person. I do realize that God's people with warmth and love, compassion and care, can make a tremendous difference in those lonely birds around us. We get stuck out there on a limb on a cold morning. If we just watch and care and get close enough to them, we could be a tremendous help.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

Christians of different races unite for worship

CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP) — About 300 worshipers filled the sanctuary of historic Mother Emanuel Church Nov. 13 for a session of South Carolina Baptists' annual meeting, held at the site of the 2015 massacre of nine black worshipers by a self-avowed white supremacist.

An overflow crowd of 400 watched from closed-circuit TV at the nearby Citadel Square Church.

South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) President Marshall Blalock had arranged for messengers to hold evening worship at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in keeping with the annual meeting theme, Building Bridges.

"I don't know if we've ever been in a more sacred place," Blalock told messengers and guests. "As we gather in Mother Emanuel Church, the place itself speaks to us of the power of faith in Christ Jesus."

"We're in a place of safety because, while it's where hearts were broken, it's also the place where the life-saving power of God's grace is."

Blalock's heart was changed in the months following the race-motivated murders at Mother Emanuel on June 17, 2015, he said, when he realized there was unintentional segregation in his own network of relationships.

"The outpouring of love and unity that inspired the world has faded some over time, but the deep conversations over race can now take place," he told The Baptist Courier, SCBC's weekly news journal, a year after the shootings.

Ronnie Floyd, the senior pastor

of multi-campus Cross Church in Arkansas who emphasized racial unity during his Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) presidency 2014-2015, was among guest speakers. He was joined by host pastor Eric Manning, Southeastern Seminary assistant professor Walter Strickland, and Anthony Thompson whose wife Myra died in the 2015 shooting.

Living the Gospel

Floyd chose John 13:34 to emphasize that love must cross racial lines. "Racism is an assault on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When you belong to Jesus, you belong to love. You forfeit your right to choose whom you will love."

He recalled the 2015 SBC Annual Meeting. The evening of July 16, messengers were on their knees praying for the country to have a spiritual awakening. Less than 24 hours later, he began hearing the shocking news coming out of Charleston.

"It was genuine grief," Floyd said. "It felt like Satan had seen us on our face before God and said, 'I'll show you,' but you showed the world what love is. Love is God's way to build bridges."

"Southern Baptists, you are not known by your creeds, songs, doctrine, knowledge, achievements, dress, appearance, or color of your skin. You are only known by His love and His love through you."

Living out the Gospel brings credibility to what the church believes, Floyd said. "We need to live it out. We need to stop letting our nation define who we are. Love is the one note of the true church."



WORSHIPPING TOGETHER — Messengers and guests fill the sanctuary of Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, S.C., during a session of the 2018 annual meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. (BP photo courtesy of The Baptist Courier)

Vision for Christ

As an African American and Southern Baptist, Strickland admitted to being "confounded at what to say... in this building filled with a number of Southern Baptists, with our thorny past marked by the affirmation of slavery that sends reverberations into the present day."

Strickland, SBTS associate vice president for Kingdom Diversity Initiatives, praised the host church. "Emanuel has not allowed foiled slave revolts, arson, or a massacre to thwart a vision for making Christ known and hastening the coming of His kingdom."

While Christians "lament any vestiges of brokenness that sin has forged in our lives and in our country," Strickland said, "we are stubborn, and we have a tendency to push away from God's design of

being unified in our diversity, and away from each other because of cultural unease, historical baggage, or personal preferences."

Strickland offered hope found in Revelation 7:9-10. "John's vision does not function solely as a window into 'the sweet by and by.' It is to call God's people to live lives as those who actively are trying to manifest the riches of the Kingdom in the present."

Reconciling racially

Building bridges across racial lines is "perhaps the premier litmus test" for spiritual maturity, Strickland said, and doing so indicates an ability to stand on the power of the Gospel.

"We look to Jesus plus something else to bind us together, even amongst believers, but any

time we add something to Christ for the purpose of unity, that thing takes the Gospel captive. Perhaps we have not been able to come together because we are not as spiritually mature as we think we are."

The work involved in reconciling racially makes us more like Jesus, Strickland stressed. Jesus' work on the cross wrought victory over not only sin and death, he said, but also over racism, bias, prejudice, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and discrimination.

"In our efforts to do His will now, it is not about achieving the goal, but about the work that is done on us in the process," Strickland said. "This is why we talk about diversity. This is why we talk about racial reconciliation. ... It's because it forces us to become like our Savior."

Forgiving a killer

All people need to be forgiven, said Thompson, pastor of Holy Trinity Reformed Episcopal Church in Charleston, to relieve the burden of sin borne by humanity.

"Sin is a disease that eats at the hearts of all mankind. It is hatred, it is racism, it is discrimination, it is violence," he pointed out. "It causes divisions, it causes separation in our lives, in our families' lives, our communities, our nation, and our church."

Thompson told the story of how he publicly — and unexpectedly, even for himself — forgave his wife's killer at a bond hearing. God empowered Thompson to forgive, the widower told South Carolina Baptists.

Revivals & Homecomings

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Spared from abortion, musician tells his story

PIKEVILLE, Ky. (BP) — Growing up wasn't simple for Jason Lovins, who was sometimes uncomfortable explaining his situation.

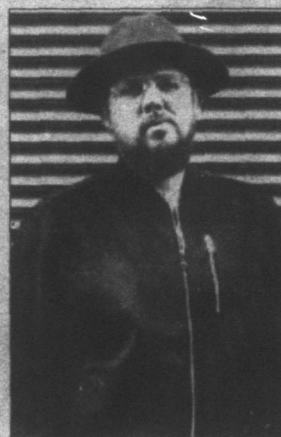
"When I was young, I would lie about it and make up a story to explain where my dad was," he said. "It wasn't that I was embarrassed, as I accepted the actuality of my story at a very young age... I felt like a normal kid. The fact is that I didn't want anyone feeling sorry for me, so I'd make something up."

Lovins' life story keeps people on the edges of their seats as he confides that he was conceived in the rape of a 15-year-old girl as she walked home from the pool — and how that young Christian chose to give him life rather than have an abortion.

Lovins tours the country now, singing with his band and telling people about forgiveness, redemption, and the depth of God's love from a perspective that is both heart wrenching and heartwarming.

The Jason Lovins Band, based in Appalachia with the region's rich history of Country and Southern Gospel music, has blended praise and worship music with the old hymns of the church for a unique sound that has gained national attention.

Things typically get quiet when Lovins tells of being born into a Christian family where abortion was not an op-



Lovins

tion, no matter what the circumstances. When it became evident his mother was pregnant, the first thing his grandmother and mother did was go to church to pray about it. The answer was clear that this baby was to have life and live it in glory to the Lord.

His very first memory is attending his mother's high school graduation when he was three years old. His family made it clear that even though he didn't have an earthly father, Jason had a heavenly Father who loved him more than he could even know.

"...I realized that I could help people by telling my story and that is what God was speaking to me."

Jason Lovins

Christian musician

Lovins received his love of music from his family, especially his grandmother. He remembers attending church and watching her Gospel group perform, and that started his career playing guitar and singing with the ensemble.

In 2000, he met a group of musicians who joined together at the Baptist campus ministry each day at 4 p.m. at Morehead State University in Morehead, Ky., where they jammed and made music for Jesus.

They were so diligent about starting every day at the same time, they were dubbed the "4 O'Clock Band."

The 4 O'Clock Band had some early success playing youth camps and churches, and it was around this time that Lovins started telling his story.

"I think that I realized that I could help people by telling my story and that is what God was speaking to me," Lovins recounted. "At camp one summer I met a 16-year-old girl who was raped and had a baby from it. I shared my story and I believe that was the first time that she discovered that she wasn't alone in the world."

It was two years later that Lovins folded the 4 O'Clock Band and the Jason Lovins Band was launched with new members. The group started honing their sound and, in the process, developed an impressive following which led to a booking to lead worship at a Lifeway Centrifuge camp.

After that, the band began touring, with requests from churches, state conferences, revivals, and student camps. Today the band, consisting of Lovins, Jose Mendoza, Rodney Mora, Ryan Smith, and Aaron Crozier, has proven popular with all age groups.

"We did a crusade in Arizona and one of the Billy Graham guys made a comment in a meeting. He said, 'I don't know who these guys are but I walked to their table and they're taking pictures with little kids. Then they went inside and were taking pictures with old women and families. I've never seen anybody that can reach all ages like that.'"

"That's how we've always been."

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Perspectives

ABORTION

cont. from p. 1

released Sept. 21 that the governor "fully supports the defense of this law moving forward. Gov. Bryant has been committed to making Mississippi the safest place in America for an unborn child since taking office and is disappointed in Tuesday's ruling against a law that protects both mother and child."

Bryant is a Republican, and both chambers of the Mississippi Legislature are controlled by Republicans.

Mississippi Attorney General Jim Hood announced Nov. 23 that he will indeed appeal Carlton's ruling.

"Although other federal circuits

which have reviewed 15-20 week abortion bans have found them to be unconstitutional, our [U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit] has not yet reviewed a case like this. Because there is no controlling decision from our Fifth Circuit, it is our duty to appeal this ruling to the Fifth Circuit."

Hood did not speculate on a timetable for the appeal to the Fifth Circuit and then, if necessary, to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Democrat has announced he will be a candidate for governor in next year's state elections.

Kenny Digby, executive director of the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention in Jackson, believes Carlton's ruling is an example of how activist judges inappropriately engage in lawmaking, a consti-

tutional duty ascribed to another branch of government.

"Federal judges should not legislate from the bench," he said. "The 15-week ban on abortions in Mississippi will be appealed and probably accepted by the higher court for a hearing. At some point, *Roe v. Wade* should be evaluated as to the procedures used to determine that flawed ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court. This could be historic."

Upon the law's passage in March, Mississippi's only remaining abortion provider, the Jackson Women's Health Organization on North State Street in Jackson, sued the state and received a temporary injunction from Reeves that halted implementation. Reeves issued a permanent injunction on Nov. 21.

CHAU

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to the shore and make preliminary contact with the Sentinelese.

At one point a child reportedly shot an arrow at him that pierced his waterproof Bible. Chau apparently offered the Sentinelese fish and other small gifts before they killed him.

According to the missions website JoshuaProject.net, the Sentinelese are "dark, tall people who hunt, gather, and fish," and are "completely isolated from the rest of the world." Attempts by the Indian government to make peaceful contact were met "with arrows and stones," so "the Indian government now leaves them alone and entering the North Sentinel island is not allowed." PeopleGroups.org, another missions website, reports the Sentinelese practice "ethnic religions" and not Hinduism or Islam like many other Indians.

Online estimates of the number of Sentinelese range from 40-500.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., devoted most of his Nov. 26 podcast *The Briefing* to Chau's death. "It's important for Christians to understand it is always right and never wrong to share the Gospel with anyone, whether or not they are believed to be a part of either a reached or an unreached people group. But methodology is important here."

"To put the matter bluntly," Mohler said, Chau's evangelistic method "is not the way that most modern missions organizations would seek to reach this kind of group. That doesn't mean that they wouldn't demonstrate the same kind of courage. It doesn't mean that missionaries even today are not serving under the threat of martyrdom and often facing the reality of martyrdom."

Eitel told Baptist Press (BP) the best way to reach an uncontacted UUPG generally is first to gather as much information about them as possible, then find someone with a cultural link to that people group and let them introduce the missionary.

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Clue: L = H

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Revelation 1:8

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

75 FOUNDATION FLASHBACKS

Highlights from the history of your Mississippi Baptist Foundation shared in the format of their original publication in *The Baptist Record*. The following article was published on August 13, 1964.

Foundation Is Mission Agency

The Mississippi Baptist Foundation is a missionary agency in the truest sense of the word, it has been declared by Dr. Harry Lee Spencer, executive secretary.

As an example he said the Foundation has \$44,866.62 in permanent endowment, the income from which goes to the Foreign Mission Board and which amount to \$2,283.74 during the past nine months.

The Foundation has \$3,000 permanent endowment, the income from which goes to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and which amounted to \$151.74 during the past nine months.

The R. B. Thomas fund has provided \$4,500.00 in income to the Foreign Mission Board the past nine months, making a grand total of \$6,935.48 to foreign missions during this period.

In addition to the above, \$1,128.83 was provided to the Home Mission Board in Atlanta and \$2,197.86 to the State Convention Board for missionary causes during the past nine months.

That makes a grand total of \$10,262.17 in income to mission causes during the past nine months, declared Dr. Spencer.

Thanks to the generosity of Mississippi Baptists just like you, funds managed by your Mississippi Baptist Foundation for the benefit of the International Mission Board have increased significantly since the above, referenced article was first published. And, while year-end gifts for 2018 are yet to be distributed and tallied, Foundation distributions to the International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, Cooperative Program, and Mississippi Baptist in-state missions well exceeded \$300,000 in fiscal year 2018.

>>> As you plan your missions giving this year, consider the opportunity you have to support international missions beyond your lifetime. Your Mississippi Baptist Foundation is available to answer questions and help you formulate a plan for Legacy Giving. Contact us through our website, msbaptistfoundation.org, call 601-292-3210, or e-mail foundation@mbcb.org.

The Deceiver • Genesis 27:18-29

Most of us have had to deal with a deceitful person in our lives at some point. Deception causes mistrust, hard feelings, and tension within families, among friends, and with co-workers. Believers are encouraged to be transparent and honest in their relationships. Today's lesson provides many points to ponder about the dangers of being a deceiver.

A Deceitful Son (27:18-23)

Jacob was a deceiver. Born shortly after his brother Esau, Jacob was grasping his brother's heel. In fact, the name "Jacob" means "heel-holder" in Hebrew (Gen. 25:26). The blessing of the birthright was Esau's, meaning he would one day receive a double portion of his father's inheritance. Jacob was too keen and too competitive to allow that to happen. Seizing an opportunity, Jacob gave Esau a bowl of stew in exchange for the birthright (Gen. 25:27-34).

However, Isaac loved Esau, favoring the older son because he liked the taste of the wild game he hunted (Gen. 25:28). His favoritism toward Esau was matched by his wife's favoritism toward the younger twin, Jacob. In this setting of parental favoritism with the father favoring the older twin and the mother the younger twin, Jacob developed into a deceiver.

When Isaac promised the patriarchal blessing to Esau for some venison, Rebekah

launched a plan whereby Jacob could intercept the blessing. Thus, we read in Gen. 27:18-23 of Jacob's multifaceted deception. First, he claimed to be Esau. Second, he claimed God had blessed his hunt, enabling him to kill game in a short time. Third, he wore Esau's clothes and put the skins of young goats on his hands and the smooth part of his neck so his father would think he was Esau (Gen. 27:16).

Jacob took full advantage of his father's blindness. Yet, is such behavior desirable for those who follow Christ? Can those who



Explore the Bible

with W. Wayne VanHorn

Can Christians sow the seeds of their own relational misfortunes? Yes, they can and they often do. Like Isaac, Christ-followers can allow themselves to be driven by

ambition, appetite, or personal aggrandizement. Isaac and Rebekah created a home environment that gave rise to deception due to their favoritism of one son over the other. Believers must avoid favoritism because it can lead to deception.

A Stolen Blessing (27:28-29)

The father's blessing was a big deal in

ancient times. Gen. 27:28 was a powerful blessing from the perspective of an agricultural society. The "dew of heaven," the "fatness of the earth" and the "abundance of grain and new wine" represented God's provision of a bountiful harvest.

The blessing became more personal in Gen. 27:29 as Isaac implored God to grant "Esau" the status of master under whom the peoples would serve and the nations and his brothers would bow down. The prayer for anyone cursing "Esau" to be cursed and for those blessing him to be blessed harkens back to God's blessing of Abram (Gen. 12:3). Unknowingly, Isaac allowed Jacob to steal his brother's blessing.

God can accomplish His purposes even through selfishly motivated people. He had revealed to Rebekah, before her sons were born, that the older son would serve the younger son (Gen. 25:23). His sovereignty would assure the outcome. However, the ends do not justify the means. God does not rely on deceit from His children to advance His plans in this world. Rather, God works His plan in this world in spite of the shortcomings of His people. As believers, we can trust God to accomplish His purposes while allowing His Holy Spirit to sanctify us as we mature in our faith.

VanHorn is Dean of the Mississippi College School of Christian Studies and the Arts.

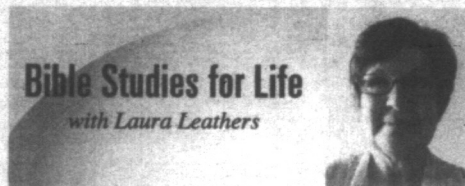
Isaiah's Prophecy • Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5

There are hundreds of prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament. In an internet article entitled, *The Promise of the Messiah*, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., states, "The prophecies about the Messiah were not a bunch of scattered predictions randomly placed throughout the Old Testament, but they form a unified promise-plan of God, where each promise is interrelated and connected into a grand series comprising one continuous plan of God." The first prophecy is found in Genesis 3:15. In today's lesson, the focus will be on three prophecies found in the book of Isaiah.

The historical setting finds King Ahaz of Judah on the throne, fearful because Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, are making war against Jerusalem, "but they could not pre-vail against it" (Isa. 7:1 KJV). Meanwhile, another threat was looming. Assyria had grown strong and the surrounding smaller nations were threatened. Rezin and Pekah wanted Judah to join with them to go against Assyria, however Ahaz refused. Then the Lord tells Isaiah to take his son, Shear-Jashub, and go to Ahaz and say, "Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs" (Isa. 7:4 NKJV). This is Ahaz's message of assurance; trust and have faith in God.

The Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign. Instead, Ahaz piously refuses the generous offer and states he would be wrongly putting God to a test. He chose to make a secret treaty with Assyria thinking this would bring protection. The Lord does give a sign, but not to Ahaz. He instructs Isaiah to go before the whole "house of David" and say, "... Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (vs. 14 ESV). The name Immanuel was the sign and also the message, "God with us." God promised a son! (Fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Matt. 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-31.)

The second prophecy comes from Isaiah 9:6-7, God Promised a Child. When you read verse six, do you read it or do you want to sing it? Composer George Frideric Handel wrote such a beautiful composition using only "... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." Note the words 'a child is born' which declares humanity and 'a son is given' which represents the deity. The word 'given' means a divine gift of grace to sinners. "His name shall be called ... Wonderful Counselor." The word wonderful means 'incomprehensible,' beyond our understanding (see Judges 13:18). Counselor means one with great wisdom and leadership. "His name shall be called ... Mighty God," representing his deity. "His name shall be called ... Everlasting Father," which describes His steadfast love and faithfulness, the intimate relationship with His people. Lastly, "His name shall be called ... Prince of Peace" signifying a rich harmonious life and "there will be no end" to this peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7, John 14:27; Isa. 26:3). (Fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:31-33; 2:7,11.)



Bible Studies for Life

with Laura Leathers

us a son is given." Note the words 'a child is born' which declares humanity and 'a son is given' which represents the deity. The word 'given' means a divine gift of grace to sinners. "His name shall be called ... Wonderful Counselor." The word wonderful means 'incomprehensible,' beyond our understanding (see Judges 13:18). Counselor means one with great wisdom and leadership. "His name shall be called ... Mighty God," representing his deity. "His name shall be called ... Everlasting Father," which describes His steadfast love and faithfulness, the intimate relationship with His people. Lastly, "His name shall be called ... Prince of Peace" signifying a rich harmonious life and "there will be no end" to this peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7, John 14:27; Isa. 26:3). (Fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:31-33; 2:7,11.)

In our final passage the prophecy is, God Promised a Descendent of David, Isaiah 11:1-5. We find this unconditional promise announced to David by the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:16, "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (NKJV). David's dynasty would come to a close, yet in God's plan and timing there would come forth a shoot out of a stump which would be the stem of Jesse. Hope was coming. Jesus the Messiah (Rom. 1:3; Rev. 5:5). In verse two, note the repeated phrase "the Spirit of" and what it will do and bring: the LORD rests upon him, wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD. The Messiah will not judge with his eyes or what he hears, but he will judge with righteousness. He shall reign because He is the King of Kings. (Fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Matt. 1:6,16; Acts 13:23; and Rev. 22:16.)

"But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18 ESV). Joy to the world the Lord has come, as He promised!

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

SBC

cont. from p. 1

a church immediately, others may need to simply begin the process with assistance from the North American Mission Board (NAMB) or the International Mission Board (IMB), Greear noted.

■ Asking every Southern Baptist who is a recent college

graduate to pursue the first two years of their career in a location where they can serve through a new church plant. The IMB, NAMB, or a state convention can help graduates find an appropriate city and church plant, he said.

Another topic of conversation during the 13-minute Facebook Live broadcast was Greear's call for Southern Baptists to pray and fast for

four SBC entities presently seeking presidents.

Those entities include the SBC Executive Committee, LifeWay Christian Resources, New Orleans Seminary, and Southwestern Seminary.

IMB, which has also been searching for a new leader, extended a call Nov. 15 through the entity's trustees to Paul Chitwood, executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Con-

vention, to serve as president.

"If He's going to make our institutions greater, then it's going to be because we are single-focused on getting the Gospel to the lost," Greear said. "[If the SBC is] looking to our past for the future, that's a dim future. If we're looking to our present talent, that's a dim future but if we just say, 'God, we want to humbly trust in Your Word,' that is a bright future indeed."

Greear also utilized the Facebook Live broadcast to provide an update on the Sexual Abuse Advisory Study he has undertaken in conjunction with the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville.

The study will be a two-year process and include a fluid group of outside experts, denominational leaders, and pastors. The study is currently in its first of three phases.

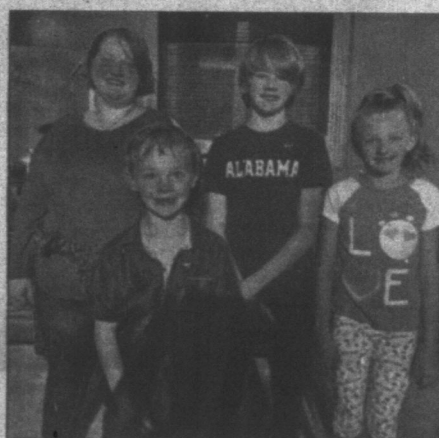
Just for the Record



More than 50 women from congregations across the county participated in the annual Blessings for Women dinner program at **NEW BETHEL CHURCH, CARROLL COUNTY**, Nov. 10. A meal, served by the men, was followed by testimony advocating discipleship by Tece Goins; Goins's talk was preceded by inspirational songs performed by three of her daughters, all of the French Camp area.



THE BACKPACK MINISTRY OF LYMAN CHURCH, GULFPORT, gives away over 33 food bags per week. Twenty holiday turkey boxes for Thanksgiving and Christmas went to the Lyman Elementary School.



Four people were baptized at **CENTERPOINT CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN**, Nov. 25. Dinner on the grounds followed. Shown are Chelbie Newton, Meadville; Walker Breazeale, Wesson; J.T. Moss, Wesson; and Lillian Moss, Wesson.

In other Church News:

► **Flowood Church, Flowood**, is having a live nativity scene Dec. 7 - 9, 5:30 - 8:00 p.m. Free.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. **Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted.** Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

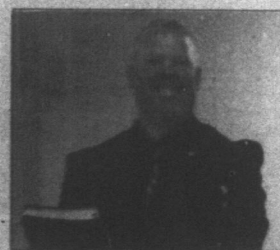
There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Staff Changes



GASTON CHURCH, BOONEVILLE, has called Bob Gregory to serve as minister of youth and college. He is shown with his wife Alexandria.



HILLCREST CHURCH, CARRIERE, has called Jason Skinner as pastor. He and his wife Angela live in Poplarville and have one son, two daughters, a son-in-law, and a grandson. He is also the owner of Skinner's Lawn and Auto Detail.



SOUTH NETTLETON CHURCH, NETTLETON, has called Jeffrey Adams as pastor. Shown with Adams is his wife Candice, daughter Gabryrille, and son Emmanuel.

Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.